Poems from the Mediatized Soulscape

J. Martin Strangeweather

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for the Morlocks and the Eloi,

and our future A.I. cybercrats

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Poems from the Mediatized Soulscape

Media + Hypnotized = Mediatized

Mediatized realism is akin to surrealism and magical realism, but with a distinctly North American character. Whereas surrealism originates in Europe and focuses on the uncanny materializations of the unconscious into our conscious experience, and magical realism emerges from Latin America and portrays the supernatural as matter-of-factly interwoven with everyday reality, mediatized realism persistently draws attention to the strategies through which corporate and political agents deliberately reshape the imaginative landscape of a culture via mass media and social media. While surrealism distorts and withholds information from the reader (mimicking the unconscious), and magical realism presents extraordinary information as ordinary, mediatized realism inundates the reader with information, much of it extraneous, misleading, and contradictory.

Factoid #1

In 1928, Edward Bernays, American pioneer of propaganda, published his seminal work, *Propaganda*, in which he argues that public relations plays a crucial role in establishing and maintaining societal order. Here is an excerpt from the book: "The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. We are governed, our minds molded, our tastes formed, and our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of … it is they who pull the wires that control the public mind."

The Psychic War

The psychic war is real
It's been going on
For about a hundred years
You've probably never heard of it
Which means they are winning

The psychic war is being waged
Inside your scarred battlefield of a mind
Through weapons of mass distraction
Strategic division and weaponized derision
And it's about to get worse
Much worse

Tinfoil hats aren't enough anymore
We must don tinfoil suits of armor
Barricade ourselves inside tinfoil tanks
Firing anti-fascist projectiles
Made of wadded pages
Torn from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*

I-Brain

You think more with your I-Brain
than your real brain.
Don't pretend you don't.

Your real brain
is the I-Brain.
Don't pretend it isn't.

The I-Brain is not
an extension of you.
You are an extension of
the I-Brain.

The Malady

We used to just watch people on the screen.
Now we are the people on the screen.
Now we are the screen,
and everyone is an advertisement
for their own brand
of desperation.

The more time one spends interacting with or through screen-based media, the less responsible one feels for engaging in the social norms (politeness, respectfulness, attentiveness, and so on) that accompany face-to-face interaction. As one becomes less able to display the social norms necessary for positive (or even neutral) face-to-face exchanges, one increasingly withdraws into isolation, experiencing reality vicariously through a screen filtered and attuned to their specific sensibilities, which in turn makes meaningful and healthy face-to-face communication progressively more difficult.

More Cake, Please

Swiping to the left of what's left to swipe,
I come across the pretty face
of the woman of my dreams.
I come across the pretty face,
the pretty face on the screen.
Her name is Orpah Winfret,
and she's the daytime talk show queen.

We meet at Jack's Bistro
along Route 66 in Beverly Hills,
right next to the spot where
the comedian Ernie Kovacs
died in a car crash.
But you probably don't remember Ernie.
He used to say stuff like:
"The most important thing is to be sincere,
whether you mean it or not."

Anyway,
Orpah doesn't look anything like her picture.
There's no frame around her,
and she's not made of pixels,
though she does seem two-dimensional.

Orpah orders a microphone and a film crew.
I order breadsticks.
They come right away,
fresh from the oven, piping hot.
Not the breadsticks, the film crew.

"Look under your chair," says Orpah.
And I say, "Huh?"

"Surprise!" she says.
"For participating in tonight's date,
everyone gets a Samsung Galaxy IQ smartphone!"

And I say, “Um…”

All the diners are looking under their chairs,
squealing and oinking with delight as they hold up
their brand-new Samsung Galaxy IQ smartphones,
still in the package.

“Bachelor Number One,” says Orpah,
reading from her cue card,
“who were you fantasizing about
the first time you masturbated?”
The cameraman zooms in on my face.

And I say, “Er…”

The waiter comes with two baskets of breadsticks
and sets them on the table.

“Only one of these is real,” he says.
“The other is a cake.
Which one is real
and which one is fake?”

And I say, “Uh…”

I have no patience for dating games.
I choose the one
that looks like a basket of breadsticks.

“Surprise!” says Orpah.
“They’re both made of cake!
It’s all cake! Everything’s cake!
Have yourself a sweet slice of life!”

I grab the cake knife
and stick it in the waiter’s gut.
She isn’t exaggerating.
The waiter is cake.

I flip the table over,
only to discover that it's cake, too—
hazelnut marzipan
with a vanilla fondant tablecloth.

I check to see if my date is cake,
slicing her in half, right down the middle.
Her raspberry cream filling
oozes onto the floor.
The floor itself is made of cake,
a dry, run-of-the-mill chocolate.

Slicing further downward,
I split our four-layer planet in twain,
exposing the whole world's cakey fakery.

Everything and everyone
is mostly just frosting.

Having had my fill of the spectacle,
I plunge the knife deep inside my chest,
and cut myself a slice.
Did I mention I'm cake, too?

We're all moist and delicious cakes,
ooey and gooey and decadently rich.
We can't help but devour one another.
It's a cake eat cake world.

Exploring the mediatization of this poem:

1. The author had been binge-watching *Is it Cake?* on Netflix at the time of this poem's creation.
2. The author's spouse made a comment which incorporated the dating app idiom of "swiping to the left" at the time of this poem's creation.
3. The poem starts with a man looking at a screen in the pursuit of fulfillment.
4. The narrator's date's name is a not-so-subtle variant of Oprah Winfrey, a famous talk show host.
5. Jack's Bistro is a reference from the television show *Three's Company*, which was set in Santa Monica, California.
6. The poem incorporates elements of the television game shows *The Dating Game* and *Is it Cake?*, inviting surreal comparisons between the two.

7. The poem is written in a manner which incorporates cinematic special effects to literary ends, i.e., mediatized realism.
8. The poem is constantly alluding to the manufactured experience of our life, the Hollywoodization of our consciousness.
9. "Having had my fill of the spectacle…" is a reference to Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967).

Factoid #2

American novelist and political critic Mary McCarthy on mass media manipulation: “The Nixon success, if it’s really serious, is too horribly Orwellian to contemplate; it would mean that mass society is a reality, which nobody here, even those who have denounced its symptoms, really has ever believed except in talk. The idea that people are influenced, not by their passions or interests, but by advertising techniques, i.e., by mass-conditioning, blows all my conceptions of U.S. life sky-high.” This quote is from 1952. Needless to say, no one is shocked by the idea of mass media programming/conditioning any longer, which itself should be shocking, though it is not. We have grown numb from psychic abuse.

McCarthy, Mary. *The Writing on the Wall and Other Literary Essays*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970.

Mediatized

I'm down in Plato's cave, strapped into my seat, looking up at the projection screen, watching the Titanic sinking in monochrome, the Hindenburg nosediving in Technicolor, the Death Star exploding in VistaVision, E.T. phoning home, Mel Gibson pretending to be William Wallace shouting, "Freedom!" with his dying breath, Tom Hanks sitting on a bench, remarking, "Life is like a box of chocolates," Kirk Douglas standing up and declaring, "I'm Spartacus!" Humphrey Bogart consoling Ingrid Bergman with the line, "We'll always have Paris," Ralph Macchio telling Ponyboy to "stay gold," Al Pacino chanting, "Attica!" Marlon Brando in a ripped shirt yelling, "Stella!" Meg Ryan faking an orgasm in a crowded restaurant, Jimmy Stewart desperately pleading, "I want to live again!" Sean Connery and Roger Moore saying their name is Bond, James Bond, Clint Eastwood threatening some punk to go ahead and make his day, Judy

Garland admitting to her dog, “I have a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore,” Charlton Heston commanding Yul Brynner to let his people go, Jack Nicholson dressed in a colonel’s uniform, stating matter-of-factly that we can’t handle the truth, Charlie Chaplin imitating Hitler, Bugs Bunny in drag seducing Elmer Fudd, Richard Attenborough welcoming the audience to Jurassic Park, Gene Kelly singing in the rain, Julie Andrews twirling on a mountaintop, Slim Pickens riding an atom bomb to ground zero, a gusty subway grate blowing up Marilyn Monroe’s white dress and showing off her shapely legs, Anthony Perkins stabbing Janet Leigh in the shower, Cary Grant fleeing from a crop duster, Sylvester Stallone running up some stairs in a sweatshirt and sweatpants, seven astronauts strutting down a corridor, seven diamond thieves and one undercover cop ambling through a parking lot, John Cleese walking very silly, Uncle Ben warning Tobey Maguire, “Remember, with great

power comes great responsibility," Robert De Niro looking in the mirror and asking, "You talkin' to me?"

Immobilized by eidetic tentacles of cinema,
even the simplest expressions of freedom
are extremely difficult,
requiring an extraordinary effort
of concentration
and willpower.

The Revolution Will Be YouTubed

the revolution will be no re-run, brothers
the revolution will be live [1]

a revolution is a struggle
between the future and the past [2]

oh, the movie never ends
it just goes on and on
and on
and on [3]

a diamond is forever [4]

---

[1] Gil Scott-Heron
[2] Fidel Castro
[3] Journey
[4] De Beers

ideas are more powerful than guns
we would not let our enemies have guns
why should we let them have ideas [5]

i actually don't like thinking
i think people think i like to think a lot
and i don't
i do not like to think at all [6]

have it your way [7]

[5] Joseph Stalin
[6] Kanye West
[7] Burger King

i'm the object of criticism around the world
but i think that since i am being discussed
i am on the right track [8]

everyone is entitled
to my opinion [9]

don't leave home without it [10]

[8] Kim Jong Il
[9] Madonna
[10] American Express

just do it [11]

i want you to know that everything i did
i did for my country [12]

i'm the tool of the government
and industry too
for i am destined to rule
and regulate you [13]

there is freedom of speech
but i cannot guarantee freedom
after speech [14]

there are some things money can't buy [15]

---

[11] Nike
[12] Pol Pot
[13] Frank Zappa
[14] Idi Amin
[15] Mastercard

the beam becomes my dream
my dream is on the screen [16]

by the skillful and sustained use of propaganda
one can make a people see even heaven as hell
or an extremely wretched life as paradise [17]

they might be better off i think
the way it seems to me
making up their own shows
which might be better than T.V. [18]

[16] Blondie
[17] Adolf Hitler
[18] Talking Heads

Factoid #3

American inventor Philo T. Farnsworth invented the television, designing the basic components (e.g., the image dissector tube) in 1921 when he was only 14 years old. Many years later, here's what Farnsworth told his son about his most famous invention: "There's nothing worthwhile on it, and we're not going to watch it in this household, and I don't want it in your intellectual diet."* He would recant these words after watching the historic broadcast of the Apollo 11 moon landing in 1969, professing, "This has made it all worthwhile."

Polls conducted between 1994 and 2009 indicate that approximately 35 million Americans (roughly 10% of the United States population) believe the moon landing was a Hollywood hoax directed by Stanley Kubrick. Others believe we did in fact land on the moon, but the government is covering up the alien spaceships we found there, and some even believe the moon itself is a gigantic spaceship akin to the Death Star from *Star Wars*. According to Zulu legend, the moon is a giant egg that was stolen from "the great fire dragon" and brought here by two godlike

brothers named Wowane and Mpanku, who are described as having skin of snakelike or fishlike scales. Conspiracy theorist David Icke claims the moon is a hologram-broadcasting station operated by reptilian humanoids from the Draco constellation.

Philo Farnsworth conceived a device that would someday broadcast the first human setting foot on the moon, eventually leading to David Icke's conception of a moon that could broadcast the holographic illusion constituting Philo Farnsworth's entire world.

* Although this quote is famously attributed to Farnsworth, there's no definitive proof he ever actually said it.

Schatzkin, Paul. *The Boy Who Invented Television*. Incorrigible Arts, 2023.

Poletika, Nicole. "*Philo T. Farnsworth: The Father of Television Part III*." *Indiana Historical Bureau*, 28 Feb. 2014, https://www.in.gov/history/about-indiana-history-and-trivia/explore-indiana-history-by-topic/marking-hoosier-history-archive/philo-t-farnsworth-the-father-of-television-part-iii/..

Phillips, Tony. “The Great Moon Hoax.” *Science@NASA*, NASA, 23 Feb. 2001. Archived 10 Apr. 2010. Accessed 30 July 2012.

Icke, David. *The Biggest Secret*. Bridge of Love Publications USA, 1999.

How to Read a Circular Book

…*craving, craving, craving,*
it was the best of times
if you read between the lines,
it was the worst of times
if you read between the lines,
craving, craving, craving,
we the readers of the United States,
in order to form a more perfect understanding
of what it means to read between the lines,
craving, craving, craving,
literary theorists shall make no law
respecting an establishment of
singular interpretation,
or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;
or abridging the freedom to read between the lines,
craving, craving, craving,
reading between the lines does not delight
in confusion

but rejoices with the truth,
craving, craving, craving,
there is nothing either good or bad between the lines
but thinking makes it so,
craving, craving, craving,
as the reader awoke one morning
from troubled dreams,
he found himself transformed
into something that could only be deciphered
by reading between the lines,
craving, craving, craving,
she would've been a good reader
if there had been somebody there
forcing her to read between the lines
every minute of her life,
craving, craving, craving,
what we talk about
when we talk about reading between the lines,
craving, craving, craving,

I am he as you are he as you are me and we are all
reading between the lines,
desperately craving,
fearfully craving,
maddeningly craving,
that's one small step for man,
one giant leap for those who know how to read
between the lines,
craving this, craving that, craving more…

The Eidos of Transtextual Telepathy

I'll become you, the person reading this text,
and you'll become me, the text.

We are synthesized,
you and me.
Your mind is receptive to my verbal illusions.

If I say envision a white unicorn,
you will envision a white unicorn.
And if I say envision Albert Einstein
wearing a big red clown nose,
you will envision Albert Einstein
wearing a big red clown nose.

But something very mysterious just happened.
Aside from the red clown nose,
did you imagine him in black and white,
as a memory stolen from an old photo,

or did you imagine him in living color?
Did he have a serious expression on his face?
Was he wearing a sweater or a lab coat,
or did you skip his outfit altogether?

How much of him did you create
for yourself to see?
Did you include his shoes?
I'll bet you didn't.
Were parts of him indistinct,
even formless?

Reinterpreted and retranslated,
you are the page,
and I am reading you.

Mediatized Illusions

you are real
but this world is made up

this world is real
but you are made up

you are made up
of opposing forces
united
like a symphony orchestra

being orchestrated
by the band leader
except the band leader doesn't really exist
only the band is real

The Real You

Let me tell you who you really are…
You are every word you have ever spoken
Or committed to writing,
And you are every word you have withheld.
You are the truth of every lie you have ever told.

You are everything you have ever consumed:
All the junk food, all the booze, all the pills.
You are every penny you have ever spent.
You are the grocery store receipt,
The movie ticket, the parking ticket,
But not the obituary.

You are the crap smeared
Across your chosen brand of toilet paper.

Sharing a Moment with the Cleaning Lady

It took 13.8 billion years for the cleaning lady to be here this morning.

Hundreds of millions of stars had to burn out and die, inhaling the cosmos and then blowing out their final stardust puffs of farewell. Hundreds of millions of stars had to reincarnate into hundreds of millions of other stars, and those stars had to burn out and die and reincarnate into hundreds of millions of other stars, the mystery ever evolving, driving blindly toward consciousness. So many dead and forgotten stars. So many glories undone for the sake of the next generation. Hundreds of millions of stars had to burn out and die for the cleaning lady to be here this morning.

Hundreds of trillions of microscopic horrors had to devour one another, gluttonous for wriggling crazed terror. Hundreds of trillions of microscopic horrors had to devour one another and reincarnate into

hundreds of trillions of other microscopic horrors and devour one another and reincarnate and devour and reincarnate again and again and again. Hundreds of trillions of microscopic horrors had to devour one another, growing ever larger, more articulate, from the transubstantiation of their victims, developing holes and tubes and cilia and stalks and tentacles and tails and scales and thorns and horns and teeth and eyes and hands and thumbs for the cleaning lady to be here this morning.

Hundreds of billions of dollars had to be spent, comingling with yen and yuan and rupees and rubles and liras and baht and pounds and francs and euros and pesos. Hundreds of billions of dollars had to be spent manufacturing machines that manufacture manufacturing machines, machines to create, machines to destroy, machines to entertain, machines to imitate people. Hundreds of billions of dollars had to be spent on mortgages and rent and insurance and trains and planes and boats and buses and cars and gas and roads

and microwave ovens and refrigerators and high definition televisions and laptop computers and pencils and paper and scissors and disposable razors and alarm clocks and mobile phones and shoes and socks and shirts and shampoo and towels and laundry detergent and scrub brushes and feather dusters and disinfectant spray for the cleaning lady to be here this morning.

The guest in Room 207 watched in a sort of daze as the cleaning lady down the hallway folded a basketful of white towels hot from the dryer. Wizened hands of gnarled vein and cracked tan leather performed their duty with effortless grace. Zen hands, deft beyond thought from decades of practice, decades of repetition. Hands that clocked in with the cockcrow. Hands that clocked out with the crepuscule. Her fingers sang gospel, masterful as the hands of all the bands whose fans fill up stadiums, taking each terrycloth rectangle and spreading it out horizontally, giving it a shake and a snappy flap,

crossing it over to form a smaller vertical rectangle and crossing it in half again to form an even smaller horizontal rectangle draped over her forefingers, which she then folded into a perfect square, each iteration a mortal approximation of eternal symmetry, an unconscious habit of divine proportions. She hummed a popular tune by Selena, a tune the guest in Room 207 had never heard of, and he imagined the urgent drumbeat of Aztecs throbbing in the background of her mind.

Mediatized Monkey Business

I want you to listen to what I'm saying.
Really listen…

How can I take your mind?
I repeat, how can I take your mind?

You probably don't realize it, but
I have just taken your mind.
It's mine now.

I want you to imagine a green gorilla.
Seriously, imagine a green gorilla.

Even if you resist my command,
you'll only be struggling not to see
a green gorilla.

Do you understand?
This is how they get you, buy you, sell you.

You are the price of your attention.

Green gorillas don't exist,
yet now they do, to me and you,
whether true or not.

Here, take your mind back.
Go give it to some other stranger.

a ghostly chorus of algorithms

change the channel
and channel something different

turn the dial
alter the brainwave
and tune into someone different

the static between channels
is speaking in electronic tongues

there is no turning back
there is no reconnection

so what do you connect with
when you disconnect?

a theory is not a home
and conspiracies make an unrestful bed
but it will have to suffice

Gridlocked

Don't kid yourself.
Disconnection is impossible.
You can't live off-the-grid.
You are the grid.
The grid is you.

The grid runs on psychosocial energy.
You were born of the grid.
You carry the grid wherever you go.

Q: Why did the conformist cross the road?
A: Because mass media told him to.

Q: Why did the nonconformist cross the road?
A: Because mass media told him not to.

Conclusion: No matter what you do,
there's no escaping mass media's influence.

Politics won't free you.
Religion won't free you.
Wealth and status won't free you,
and neither will Slab City.
Sometimes alcohol and drugs help
temporarily,
but if you aren't careful,
you'll become even more addicted
to the grid.

The grid extends to the edge
of the known universe.

Factoid #4

On average, there are 15 minutes of commercials for every hour of television programming. The average U.S. child spends approximately 3 hours per day watching television*, exposing them to 45 minutes of commercials every day. This means the average U.S. child has spent well over 2,000 hours downloading consumerist propaganda into his or her receptive brain by the time they are 10 years old—well over 2,000 hours of deceptively persuasive advertising tactics drilled into their defenseless minds during the formative years. This only accounts for the commercials, to say nothing of the dubious content of the programs they are watching *between* the commercials.

* This number does not reflect actual screentime, which also includes phones, tablets, and computers, bringing the overall total to about 6 hours per day looking at a screen of one sort or another.

MedlinePlus. “Screen Time and Children.” *MedlinePlus Medical Encyclopedia*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 5 Apr. 2025, https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000355.htm.

Uncensored Poetry

I recently came across a Facebook group
called Uncensored Poetry.

Scrolling through the group's discussion posts
revealed numerous warnings
from the admins:

"Racial slurs and excessive use of profanity
will not be tolerated here."

"Gratuitously violent or disgusting material
does not belong here."

"We've been getting lots of complaints."

"Stop posting overtly sexual content
or they're going to shut us down."

"We're still getting lots of complaints."

"Stop posting about suicide and self-mutilation
or you'll get us banned."

“We’re implementing new protocols
to guarantee a positive experience
for everyone.”

“Do not post about religion
or we’ll ban you.”

“Do not post about politics
or we’ll ban you.”

“Do not post ads to buy your self-published book
or we’ll ban you.”

“Do not argue with the admins
or we’ll ban you.”

The group currently has nineteen admins who
must inspect and approve every potential post
to ensure the poetry is uncensored.

Uncensored poetry is everywhere
if you look for it.

Medea and the Fool's Gold Fleece

Medea was a sorceress
who betrayed her people
and murdered her children.

Mass Medea is an illusionist
who enslaves her people
and steals her children's souls.

Sims of Sims

Ask yourself:
Why do I believe the things I believe?

The not-so-right answer:
I believe the things I believe
because the things I believe are correct.

The righter answer:
I believe the things
I have been conditioned to believe
because the things
I have been conditioned to believe
have not totally failed me yet.

The rightest answer:
Everything I believe is false,
but I am generally in denial,
and anyway,
the show must go on.

The Matrix Squared

Take a moment to look all around you.
Notice how the landscape is overwhelmed
with human thoughts
turned concrete.

Some of us programs
wonder if we're living in a simulation.
Of course we're living in a simulation,
in at least two distinct manners:
sensorially & conceptually,
both of which simulate limited versions
of a vaster reality
not fully perceived & comprehended.
What would computerized simulation
add to this equation?

And if reality is computer generated,
who's to say the reality behind the simulation
is not itself a simulation,
and so on,
ad infinitum?
It's enough to realize that
reality is a psychosocial construct.
Everything is ideation/hallucination/simulation.

Factoid #5

American economist Robin Hanson has some strangely pragmatic advice for anyone who believes they are living in a computerized simulation: characters in a high-fidelity simulation should strive to be entertaining and praiseworthy in order to avoid being switched off, cancelled, or relegated to the role of a semiconscious (or even nonconscious) low-fidelity NPC (non-player character).

Hanson, Robin. "*How to Live in a Simulation*." *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2001, https://www.jetpress.org/volume7/simulation.pdf...

Everything We Know About Ducks Thus Far

1. If it looks like a duck and acts like a duck, it's a duck.

2. If we believe it looks like a duck and we believe it acts like a duck, let's treat it as a duck, for now.

3. A duck is a bird is a drake is a mallard is a member of the species *Anas platyrhynchos* is an image in a wildlife magazine is a rubber toy in a bathtub is a pet named Bill is dinner is dung.

4. A duck could in fact be an eagle, in which case eagles would be referred to as ducks.

5. A duck is the experience of duckness, as defined by one's culture.

6. A duck is the sum of its functions, which are too numerous to list.

7. A duck is anything that remains after every instance of non-duck has been eliminated from consideration.

8. The mallard you are experiencing (via semantic, representational, and psychological software, which combined transmit an estimated 11,000,000 bits of data per second into your cerebral hardware, though only 60 bits per second become processed into conscious awareness) resulted from your initial observation of the aforementioned duck, which collapsed the universal wave function (i.e., the hyperspatially entangled quantum superposition of identical yet probabilistically differentiated versions of the mallard in numerous alternate worlds occupying numerous alternate universes, doing every possible thing a mallard can do, being in every possible state a mallard can be in), tuning one of numerous mallard scenarios into your particular wavelength of the multiverse—your specific experience of reality.

9. Sometimes explaining a duck is like chasing a wild goose.

10. *Quack!*

Beyond the Infinity Mirror's Illusion

Whether or not I am supersymmetric strings
and photons
and quarks
and atoms
and molecules
and microscopic cells
and electrochemical synapses
and subconscious impulses
(and perhaps even soul stuff)
in a brain
in a holographic simulation
in a hyperdimensional superposition
of the multiversal wavelength,
I am still sitting at the desk in my room,
writing this poem.

In plainest words,
I am the concept
of me,
and the familiar feeling
of that concept.

Cinematic Oracle

Which movie would our nation rather watch:
the one where the crisis is easily averted
by everyone working together as equals,
or the one where the “hero” saves the day
at the very last second with a bit of luck,
and the “villain” gets what’s coming to him
after lots of bang-bangs and boom-booms?

You already know the answer.
The ratings are our rulers now.

Satori

Curly Howard has lived his whole life
in black and white
behind the silver screen,
caged on the set of Columbia Pictures,
trapped in monochrome.
Always distracted with poking an eye
or blocking a poke in the eye
or holding his painfully poked eye,
he never thought to leave the movie theater,
until it closed down for lack of moviegoers,
all of whom were at home
watching pirated movies.

Ten minutes after his brethren stooges
left for the Poconos
with their cheating wives and illegitimate children,
Curly Howard lit a Lucky Strike cigarette
and sat in the front row of the empty auditorium,

looking up at the big screen—
blank white and larger than life.
The theater had slate gray walls
and gunmetal gray chairs.
He was wearing his nicest suit,
an ash gray herringbone tweed three-piece.

No *nyuk*, *nyuk*, *nyuk*, or anything antic.
No laughter in the sanctuary aisles.
Just quietness.

The cigarette was only halfway smoked
when he stamped it underfoot
and headed to the backdoor exit.
He paused right before opening the door,
never having set foot in the unscripted world.

Curly Howard rubbed his bald head
for good luck, then pushed open the exit,
blinding him with Technicolor blue,

hypnotic, druggy blue,
a limitless expanse of ultramarine
sky unblemished by clouds,
smashing his brain to pieces
and refashioning the pieces into a mosaic bird.

He had never seen blue before.
He had never seen any color
other than gradations of gray.

It wasn't the newfound perception of blue
that affected him so deeply—
it was the newfound perception of black and white.

sanity (noun): the ability to think and behave in a normal and rational manner; sound mental health.

According to whom?

the Nazis?

the Spanish inquisitors?

the Sicilian Mafia?

the Scientologists?

the Donald Trump fanatics?

the Quakers?

the Mormons?

the atheists?

the psychological community?

your local community?

the commercials on television?

Everyone in every era is un-sane,
and the most sane behavior one can partake in
is to study our various modes of un-sanity.

If the rules and restrictions
(the guidelines?)
of sanity
are based on that which makes a society flourish
over the long term,
then it is clear that every modern-day society
is inflicted with multiple strains
of insanity.

Surreal is the New Real

The president of a small country
is on the big screen pleading for aid
against a powerful oppressor.

(insert laugh track here)

Thousands of kilometers away,
a roomful of politicians in expensive suits
give the president on the big screen
a standing ovation.

(insert laugh track here)

I watch it all from the safety of my little screen
wondering what's new on Netflix.

(insert laugh track here)

Role Models

They said I wasn't an appropriate role model
Not because of what I represent
But because of what I don't represent: their agenda
Although they phrased it less honestly
Behind my back

I told them I'm not trying to be a role model
I'm just trying to be
But my statement was censored and redacted
Before I could finish uttering it

They said I wasn't an appropriate role model
Because I tell the truth
And they were afraid of what I might say
Although they phrased it less honestly
Behind my back

Beware of politically endorsed role models
Beware of Hollywood-made role models
Beware of role models, period
Bill Cosby was a role model

I stopped believing in role models a long time ago
Now I only believe in roles

“To thine own self be true.”

Factoid #666

From 2020 to 2025, there were 1,552 primary and secondary school shootings in the United States, with a combined total of 1,210 victims. Politics are bleeding from our sons and daughters. The deadliest K-12 school shooting in U.S. history occurred at Sandy Hook Elementary on December 14, 2012, killing 20 students and 6 staff members. A small percentage of Americans believe the Sandy Hook shooting was staged to justify gun-control legislation, an idea widely spread by Alex Jones on his far-right conspiracy website *Infowars*. After several families of the victims sued him, Jones acknowledged the shooting was real, though a large percentage of his followers believe that his reversal was staged. 10% of the U.S. population also believes the Earth is flat, 13% believe former president Barack Obama is the anti-Christ, and 37% believe extraterrestrials are living among us. Approximately 1 in 3 Americans believe reality is a big PSYOP.

Riedman, David. *K-12 School Shooting Database*. 2025.

Hamilton, Lawrence C. *Conspiracy vs. Science: A Survey of U.S. Public Beliefs*. Carsey School of Public Policy, University of New Hampshire, 25 Apr. 2022.

Public Policy Polling. *Democrats and Republicans Differ on Conspiracy Theory Beliefs*. Public Policy Polling, 2 Apr. 2013.

Talker Research. "Research Reveals 1 out of 3 Americans Thinks Aliens Live among Us." *Talker News*, 30 Jan. 2024.

Evil Killed Good on January 7, 2026

His real enemy was impotence
feeling powerless, unimportant
but he was fooled into believing
the enemy was a woman, a poet
with a wife and three children
so he killed this woman
murdered her to play the hero—
this unarmed mother, this US citizen
whom he had made his enemy

We don't need no education
We don't need no thought control

Her real enemy was corruption
abuse and inequality
the spirit invested in his uniform
the mask he hid his face behind

Every breath you take
And every move you make
Every bond you break, every step you take
I'll be watching you

The last words she said
to him were, “That’s fine, dude.
I’m not mad at you.”

The last words he said
to her were, “F*cking b*tch!”

The murderer’s father describes him as
a conservative Christian

I’m dreaming of a white Christmas
Just like the ones I used to know

She too followed Christ
expressing her faith
through youth outreach and Bible study programs
while her executioner expressed his beliefs
with three gunshots to her face

You're as cold as ice
You're willing to sacrifice our love
You want paradise
But someday you'll pay the price, I know

Lyrics in order of appearance:

“Another Brick in the Wall, Part 2” by Pink Floyd

“Every Breath You Take” by The Police

“White Christmas” by Irving Berlin

“Cold as Ice” by Foreigner

Today's History Lesson

Pharaoh Amenemhat the First was murdered in his sleep by bodyguards. Pharoah Ramesses the Third was betrayed by his concubines, who reputedly slit his throat. Julius Caesar was stabbed twenty-three times by the senators of Rome. Caligula was stabbed thirty times by members of his Praetorian Guard. Claudius was murdered by his wife, who fed him poisoned mushrooms. Commodus was strangled to death by a famous wrestler named Narcissus, who was hired by conspirators. Maximinus Thrax was murdered by mutinous soldiers. Basiliscus was sealed in a dry cistern and left to die. More than sixty Roman emperors met their end by assassination or execution. Makes you wonder what the appeal of so much power was.

The human cured of humanness
is the sinner cured of sin.
From ants to men,
and men to gods,
then back to ants again.

Emperor Fu Sheng was tied to the end of a horse and dragged through the streets. Shogun Ashikaga Yoshinori was assassinated while attending a Noh play. Vlad the Impaler was cut to pieces and his head

was given to his enemy as a gift. King Henry the Third of France was gutted by a Dominican friar pretending to be a messenger. King Charles the First of England had his head lopped off with an axe for treason. King Louis the Sixteenth and Marie Antoinette were beheaded by guillotine. Tsar Nicholas the Second was shot by a firing squad, ran through with bayonets, set on fire, and disfigured with sulfuric acid, along with his family. Benito Mussolini was likewise shot to death by a firing squad, then his corpse was hung on a meat hook in the town square for everyone to spit on. Hitler blew his brains out in a bunker before anyone could get to him.

Our history lessons are written in blood
on parchments of human flesh,
and every century teaches
the same despairing lesson:

If you spill enough innocent blood
into the scales of justice,
they will eventually tip against the weight of gold,
but only for a short while.

Ode to Big Business

Ultimately, they are murdering
Their neighbors
Their descendants
And themselves

Death is a joke to them
Until it's their turn
To be the punchline

Dupont in our blood
Monsanto in our genes
Nestlé steals our water
While we counterstrike with memes

We can't get rid of the mercury
In our oceans
We can't get rid of the carbon monoxide
In our air
We can't get rid of the plastic
In our soul

"Just a little poison, what could it hurt?"
said every corporation ever

Smallpox in our blankets
Tuskegee in our veins
Inequality in our workplace
Injustice for our pains

Lynching the past
Enslaving the future
Cutting down family trees to make room
For another ~~shopping mall~~ AI data center

We can't get rid of the Walmarts
In our neighborhoods
We can't get rid of the Microsoft
In our words
We can't get rid of the Starbucks
In our soul

"Just a little poison, what could it hurt?"
said every consumer ever

We are Exxon blood and Chevron lungs
Leadened brains and bellyfuls of glyphosate
Slowly dissolving into Fukushima seas
Under Chernobyl skies

Our flesh and bones
Are made of McDonald's
Polluted with Hollywood hearts
And Maytag minds

“Don’t hate the mirror for your reflection,”
said every comedian ever

Mediatizing us with Circus Maximus 90210 24/7
Grooming us for time travel back to the Dark Ages
Cloned sheep herded and fleeced
By monstrous blasphemies of ancient gods

Like skillful politicians
They have ten scripted answers
To every yes or no question
None of which is yes or no

They blindfold us
With $100 bills
And pour legalistic glue
In our ears

They bite off our tongue
If we speak out
And use it to wipe their ass clean
Of all responsibility

Oil in their bloodlines
Gold clotting up their brains
The extinction of humanity
For monetary gains

“Don’t hate the mirror for your reflection,”
said every prophet ever

They say
There's not enough space for everyone
Yet they're big as a skyscraper

They say
There's not enough food for everyone
Yet they consume entire jungles and forests

They say
There's not enough clean water for everyone
Yet they drink lakes and rivers dry

They say
There's not enough air for everyone
Yet they inhale ozone and exhale smog

They say
There's not enough love for everyone
With their knee pressing down on your neck

Over 120,000 workers died building the Suez Canal. Over 30,000 workers died building the Panama Canal. Over 25,000 workers died building the White Sea-Baltic Sea Canal. Over 1,000 workers died building the Eerie Canal. Over 100,000 workers died building the Siam-Burma Railway. Over 1,000 workers died building the Transcontinental Railroad. The worst mining accident in Chinese history killed 1,549

workers. The worst mining accident in European history killed 1,099 workers. The worst mining accident in Japanese history killed 687 workers. The worst mining accident in African history killed 437 workers. The worst mining accident in American history killed 362 workers. The worst mining accident in Australian history killed 96 workers. The

The Antidote Is In the Poison

This poetry collection
was brought to you
by the wonders
of modern technology.

Mass media isn't just them anymore.
Mass media is me.
Mass media is you.

If you can't escape the screen,
you can at least become
your own content creator,
your own reality T.V. show,
your own brand,
your own movement.
But to what end?

"Careful," warn all the forgotten gods
and goddesses of wisdom
as you walk in their fading footsteps.

Gods and Men

Van Gogh poured his soul into *Irises*
But no one wanted to buy him

Van Gogh traded his soul
To the owner of an art supply store
For a few tubes of paint

Van Gogh suffered for his passion
Van Gogh sacrificed himself
In devotion

Shortly after Van Gogh died penniless
The art supply store owner
Sold Van Gogh's soul
To an art critic
For 300 francs

The art critic sold Van Gogh's soul
To an art collector
For $84,000

The art collector
Auctioned off Van Gogh's soul
At Sotheby's for $54,000,000
Van Gogh's soul was purchased
By an unidentified bidding agent
Over the telephone
It was the most expensive price
Ever paid for someone's soul
At that time

The J. Paul Getty Museum
Acquired Van Gogh's soul
For an undisclosed sum
(Obviously more than enough
To buy poor Vincent
Another pour of Absinthe)

Now Van Gogh's soul hangs far from home
Crucified on display
For multitudes of strangers to worship
Who will never have to pay
Except for parking

In the future, you will know my computer-generated avatar by his golden-scaled skin, his silver dreadlocks and unkempt beard streaked with rainbows, his hypnotic licks of orange flame for eyes. My avatar will wander the simulated worlds unclothed, whispering half-moon secrets and solar eclipse mysteries, his nakedness forever pixelated. He will be so much more than me, and so much less.

J. Martin Strangeweather believes we are often mistaken about what we believe. He is a poet, novelist, artist, philosopher, and the chief executive prognosticator of the Santa Ana Literary Association. His work has appeared in numerous publications, but who cares? Sometimes he refers to himself in the third person, like right now, for instance. To learn more, please visit a library.

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